



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

**MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ**

A matter of style

Friday, 9 September 2016

(by L'Osservatore Romano, Weekly ed. in English, n. 37, 16 September 2016)

Evangelization is carried out first through witness and then with words, being careful to avoid falling into the temptation of reducing ourselves to officials who stroll around and proselytize. In his homily during the Mass at Santa Marta on Friday morning, Pope Francis relaunched St Paul's "style" of evangelization, his "becoming all things to all men" without seeking personal merit. The Pope also referred to the example of St Peter Claver, a Jesuit missionary who worked among slaves.

"The apostle Paul explains to the Corinthians what it means to evangelize", the Pope affirmed, referring to the first reading in the day's liturgy (1 Cor 9:16-19, 22-27). "We too can reflect today upon what it means to evangelize", he said, "because we Christians are called to evangelize, to convey the Gospel, which means bearing witness to Jesus Christ".

And Paul, addressing the Christians of Corinth, begins his reasoning by pointing out what evangelization does not consist of: "To me, proclaiming the Gospel is not boasting". Therefore, you should certainly not boast "of going to evangelize: I am going to do this, I am going to do that",

as if evangelizing was like “taking a stroll”. This would be “reducing evangelization to a task: I have this task”. And “I am speaking about things that happen in parishes around the world”, the Pope said, “when a parish priest always has his door closed”.

It can also happen, Pope Francis continued, that you meet “lay people who say: ‘I teach this catechism class, I do this, this and this...’”. In doing so, they reduce “what they call evangelization to a task”. Perhaps they even boast, saying: “I perform this task, I am a catechist official, I am an official of this, of this or that”.

This is precisely the attitude of those who boast, the Pope insisted, and “it is reducing the Gospel to a task or even a source of pride: ‘I go and evangelize and I have brought many people to Church’”. In this way, he said, “even proselytizing is boasting”. However, “evangelization is not proselytism”. It is more: evangelization is never “taking a stroll; reducing the Gospel to a task; proselytizing”.

St Paul emphatically repeats what evangelization means, the Pope explained: preaching the Gospel “is not boasting. It is a necessity imposed upon me”. Indeed, the Pope said, referring to an expression of Paul, “a Christian is obligated, but with this force, as a necessity, to convey the name of Jesus, but from one’s own heart”. Repeating the Apostle’s clear words, the Pontiff said: “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!”.

A reprimand — “Woe to you!” — that reaches those Catholics who think: “I go to Mass, I do this and then nothing more”. However, Pope Francis cautioned, “if you say that you are Catholic, that you have been baptized, that you have been confirmed, you must go further, to convey the name of Jesus: this is an obligation!”.

Paul’s precise indications, the Pope continued, lead us to question what our “style of evangelization” should be. In short, “how can I be sure that I am not taking a stroll, that I am neither proselytizing nor reducing evangelization to a task? How can I understand what the right style is?”.

The answer Paul always gives is: “The style is to be all things to everyone”. In fact, the Apostle writes: “I have become all things to all men”. In essence it means “to go and share the lives of others, to accompany them on the journey of faith, to help them grow on the journey of faith”.

In practice, Pope Francis explained, it means conducting yourself as if “you are accompanying a child, for example: when we want a child to learn how to speak, the parents do not merely say: ‘Speak, read this and speak!’”. Rather, they first teach the child how to say “Mommy and Daddy”. In doing so, the Pope continued, they “become like children so that the child may grow”.

Therefore, the Pope stressed again, “we must do the same with our brother: to go to the situation

he is in and if he is sick, to draw near, not to bombard him with arguments; to be near, to assist him, to help him". Therefore, to answer the question about the style one should use to proclaim the Gospel, Pope Francis replied that evangelization is done precisely "with this attitude of mercy: to be all things to all men", with the certainty that "it is the testimony that brings forth the Word".

From this perspective, the Pope also wanted to share a personal confidence: "When I was in Poland, in Krakow, I was having lunch with young people at World Youth Day, and a young man asked me: "Father, what should I say to a friend who is good — he is so good! — but who is an atheist, he does not believe: what should I say to him so that he will believe?". This, Pope Francis continued, "is a good question, as we all know people who are separated from the Church: what should we tell them?". On that occasion, he recalled, his answer to the young man's question was: "Look, the last thing you need to do is to say something! Begin to act and he will see what you are doing and ask you; and when he asks you, you tell him".

In short, the Pope affirmed, "to evangelize is to give this testimony: I live this way, because I believe in Jesus Christ; I awaken within you the curiosity to ask, 'why do you do these things?'. And the Christian response should be: "Because I believe in Jesus Christ and I preach Jesus Christ and not only with the Word — you must proclaim Him with the Word — but above all with your life". Therefore becoming all things to everyone, evangelizing "where you are, in the state of mind you are in, and the state of growth you have reached".

This is what it means "to evangelize and this is also done freely", the Pope explained. Paul writes: "What then is my reward? Proclaiming the Gospel freely. Why freely? Because we have freely received the Gospel. Grace, salvation, can neither be bought nor sold". Grace is free! "And freely we must give it". We see "this gratuity, this testimony of proclaiming Jesus Christ", the Pope said, "in many men, women, religious, consecrated persons, priests and bishops, who become all things to everyone, freely".

This gratuity is found throughout the history of the Church. "Today", the Pope recalled, "we celebrate the Feast Day of St Peter Claver, a missionary who travelled far to proclaim the Gospel. Perhaps he thought that his future would be one of preaching: later the Lord asked him to draw near to the unwanted people of that time, to slaves", to people "who were brought there from Africa to be sold". And this man "was not strolling around, boasting that he was evangelizing; he did not reduce evangelization to functionalism nor to proselytism". St Peter Claver "proclaimed Jesus Christ through his actions, by speaking to the slaves, living with them and living like them". And "there are many people like him in the Church who die to themselves in order to proclaim Jesus Christ".

Before continuing the celebration, the Pope said that "all of us, brothers and sisters, have the obligation to evangelize, which does not mean knocking on your neighbour's door and saying: 'Christ is risen!'. Rather, it is primarily "living the faith, and speaking of it with meekness, with love,

without the desire of persuading anyone, but freely”, because to evangelize “is to freely give that which God freely gave to me”.